

Grace Methodist Church  
(originally Grace Methodist  
Episcopal Church)  
Northwest corner of Carrera and  
Cordova Streets  
St. Augustine  
St. Johns County  
Florida

HABS No. FLA-167

HABS

FLA.

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Eastern Office, Design and Construction  
143 South Third Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

GRACE METHODIST CHURCH  
(ORIGINALLY GRACE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH)

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Address: Northwest corner of Carrera and Cordova Streets,  
St. Augustine, St. Johns County, Florida.

Present Owner: Grace Methodist Church

Present Occupant: Grace Methodist Church Congregation.

Present Use: Sanctuary.

Statement of  
Significance: In return for their former church site on which  
the Alcazar Hotel was to be built, the land, as  
well as the church and parsonage of the Grace  
Methodist Episcopal Church, was donated in 1886  
to the congregation by Henry Morrison Flagler,  
who had amassed a great fortune as one of the  
founders of the Standard Oil Company. At that  
time the elaborate Ponce de Leon Hotel in St.  
Augustine was being constructed for Mr. Flagler  
from designs by the New York architects, Carrère  
and Hastings. This hotel building was among the  
first major examples since Roman times of a struc-  
ture that "exploited" the possibilities of mass  
concrete construction. The Grace Methodist  
Episcopal Church is similar to the hotel in con-  
struction, materials, and style; and with the  
Alcazar Hotel (HABS No. FLA-168), the Casa Monica  
(HABS No. FLA-169), and the Memorial Presbyterian  
Church (HABS No. FLA-170)--all located within a  
block or two of each other--forms one of the most  
impressive, cohesive architectural "complexes" in  
late nineteenth-century America.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- A. Physical History: The following historical account of the church is taken from Irene Llody Williams' History of Grace Methodist Church, St. Augustine, Florida, a small, authoritative brochure printed in December 1962 and available at the church. The quoted sections are to be found on pp. 7-8, and pp. 12-14:

About this time, [1886] the Ponce de Leon Hotel, Henry M. Flagler's dream child, was being constructed. He had bought the "bottom of Maria Sanchez Creek", and the marshland; the marsh had been filled in with 125-foot[sic] piles covered with concrete as a foundation for the palatial hotel, and

Flagler had sent two young architects from New York to Europe to study Spanish and Moorish architecture, and to draw plans for the Ponce de Leon Hotel. In 1886, Mr. Flagler wanted the site of Olivet M. E. Church to carry out his plans for the Alcazar and Cordova Hotels. His proposition to the Trustees of the church was that they deed to him the site of the church and, in exchange, he would deed to them the land on the corner of Carrera and Cordova Streets, and would build thereon a church and a parsonage, an exchange which was not only fair, but consistent with Mr. Flagler's characteristic generosity. His offer was accepted, and Mr. Flagler built for Methodism the Grace M. E. Church and Parsonage. They were designed by Carrere and Hastings and erected by McGuire and McDonald, the same architects and contractors that planned and built the Flagler Hotels and Flagler Memorial Presbyterian Church. Some of the same beautifully carved imported woods used in the interior of the Ponce de Leon are seen in Grace Church. The exact cost is not known, but it has been estimated at a total of eighty-five thousand dollars, which was more than Mr. Flagler had originally intended to spend, it is said.

The Official Board, at a meeting on December 29, 1886, ordered that the new church be called the "Grace Methodist Episcopal Church". The parsonage was occupied by Dr. McLean and his family in December, 1887. The first services in Grace Church were held on Sunday, January 1, 1888. The morning sermon was preached by a New York minister, and Dr. McLean conducted the evening service and preached. The church was dedicated by Bishop W. F. Mallalieu on January 15, 1888, the Conference Sunday of the second session of the St. Johns River Annual Conference which met in Grace Church. On January 27, 1888, Grace M. E. Church was legally incorporated,

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The church was mortgaged in 1889. The sum of \$2,370.00 was borrowed from the Church Extension Society to "relieve the distressed condition of the church". This debt was cancelled in January, 1908, and the mortgage was burned during a fitting ceremony. In 1925 the amount of twenty thousand dollars was obtained from the Jefferson Standard Life Insurance Company to repair and improve the church property and to purchase a Wurlitzer pipe organ. A part of this loan, eight thousand dollars, was repaid during the Florida boom, and the remaining twelve thousand became a "burden very grievous to be borne". The Rev. T. C. O'Steen brought new life and enthusiasm to the church in 1940, and the debt was paid in full during his pastorate.

Grace Methodist Church is built in authentic Spanish Renaissance style of architecture with massive walls of coquina concrete. It has undergone many changes through

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the years. The beautiful old wrought iron candle sconces were converted to gas lights and, later, discarded. In 1947 a house across the street was purchased for a parsonage, and the former parsonage connected with the church was remodeled for an educational building. During Dr. O. C. Nelson's pastorate a lot across the street from the church was purchased to relieve the congestion of cars during services. Mr. Oscar J. Stevens, Mr. E. E. Mallette and his daughter, Merle, contributed generously to the fund necessary for this purchase.

A generous bequest left by Rex Shugart was increased by the members of the church to erect a new educational building which was named Shugart Hall. Charles Shugart, Rex Shugart's uncle, was the contractor and builder. He planned work so that the young people could help in the evenings after school. About this time a new Allen electronic organ was purchased.

All of these projects added to the efficiency of the church and Sunday School, but, meantime, the sanctuary was gradually deteriorating, and the need for repairs became urgent. In 1956 a complete renovation was made possible by contributions from the membership. Approximately forty-five thousand dollars was pledged. The renovation program in the sanctuary included rewiring, refinishing the walls and woodwork, covering the floor with cork tile under the pews, with new carpet in the aisles and on the chancel, remodeling the chancel and choir loft, installing an air conditioning and heating system, and the purchase of new pews and some appropriate light fixtures. . . .

. . . The lovely window paintings are the handiwork and gift of Dr. Wilma E. Davis. . . .

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- B. Likely sources not yet investigated: Library and Archives, Florida Southern College, Lakeland, Florida.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement

1. Architectural interest: The Grace Methodist Episcopal Church and the other cast-concrete structures built for Flagler in St. Augustine are not only noteworthy because of the pioneering approach to construction which they employ, but because of the "straightforward" manner in which the concrete surfaces are left exposed. Aesthetically these buildings are impressive because of the striking contrast between the chalky-smooth salmon-colored

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surfaces of the cast-terra-cotta decorations and the rough surfaces of the exposed concrete with shell aggregate.

2. Condition of fabric: The structure is well maintained and has evidently been little altered since the date of construction.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Number of stories: One story (or one-and-a-half stories, if the clerestory is to be considered a half story) with a three-stage tower and blunt conical spire.
2. Number of bays: Five-bay front (if "bay system" is applicable) x four bays.
3. Over-all dimensions: Approximately 85'-0" front (including base of buttresses and tower) x approximately 64'-0" deep. These dimensions do not include the three, one-story, five-sided rear apses.
4. Layout, shape: The general layout is a square with an attached front, side tower, and three rear apses. There is a recent storage addition to the central apse.
5. Foundations: Concrete footings. There is no basement—only a ventilated crawl space.
6. Wall construction: Concrete with shell aggregate (probably the same used by the architects, Carrère and Hastings, in their Ponce de Leon Hotel). The concrete surface is left exposed (wooden molding marks visible). Five concrete buttresses, approximately 2'-0" in width, abut each side wall (east and west).
7. Structural system: Concrete bearing walls; interior and roof are of wooden frame construction.
8. Porches: Three-arched "enclosed" entry porch with a five-step approach. The two octagonal columns and the two half-engaged columns are of red brick, as are the arches and trim. The flat, salmon-red color is matched by the terra-cotta decoration, which consists of three imposed arches (over the buck arches) with wreath, bow-like ribbon, and twisted-rope motifs.
9. Chimneys: There are two exterior red brick chimneys attached to the rear wall of the church (just over the side walls of the central apse). They rise considerably over the main roof line and are crowned by solid truncated brick pyramids. The vertical vents are located between

two moldings below these pyramidal hoods.

10. Openings:

- a. Doors and Doorways: Within the entry porch and "centered" with each of the three porch arches are three double doors. Each of the single units of these inswinging wooden doors has sixteen deeply set molded panels with numerous octagonal, pointed studs surrounding each panel. These doors are painted to simulate bronze. At each end of this entry porch are similar, single doors (with twenty-four panels each) that give access to the minister's office in the front southeast corner of the church and to the staircase in the tower in the southwest corner. This latter doorway is recessed in a square vestibule approximately six feet behind a brick arched opening. Over all the five doorways are flat brick arches; at the sides brick quoins. The doors themselves are set in heavily molded wooden frames painted to simulate bronze.

A double wooden door (each section has six panels with moldings), painted a cream color, is located in the last bay of the west side, and leads from the covered arcade that connects the church and the former parsonage (now used for classes, meetings, and office) to the sanctuary. This door is set in a simple molded wooden frame which is also painted a cream color.

Between the three apses, and filling these two wall spaces are four-panel wooden doors under segmental openings (over which are tiled shed roofs). The westernmost four-paneled, wooden door has two-light sidelights (with attached wooden pedestals and single wooden panels below) and segmental-headed transoms with five lights. This door is approached by temporary wooden stairs (five treads) - under which is an opening in the foundation that gives access to the crawl space. The easternmost of the two wooden rear doors is at ground level, has four panels with moldings, two narrow glazed sidelights over wooden panels, and a five-light segmental transom. The wooden framework and paneling are set partially in a low brick wall approximately 2'-10" in height.

- b. Windows: The only window of the main part of the facade is set over the central arch of the entry arcade; it is round and glazed with stained glass in a relatively simple "triangular" pattern. This

window is set in a wide encircling band of dull salmon-color red bricks and terra-cotta moldings (modified egg and dart) of the same color. A string course of red brick runs across the facade - continuing what would be the horizontal diameter of this circle. Other openings in the relatively flat front elevation are located in the upper levels of the tower. There is a long narrow opening with brick quoin trim and a narrow brick flat arch located at the center of the top part of the first stage of the tower (this opening has no glazing); the second stage has two recessed, arched openings with wooden louvers. (The brick quoin trim and brick arches are heavier than at the lower level.) Similar openings are on the other sides of the square tower. (The north [rear] and west sides also have several small, arched openings - again trimmed in dull red brick.)

Between each of the buttresses of the east and west sides are two, arched windows whose plain wooden frames are set in the concrete construction. Each opening has an outward swinging casement window with stained, geometric-patterned lights and a stained-glass fixed transom with a square grid pattern and a decorative roundel. Only the narrower first bay of the east elevation (the minister's office) has a single opening. The sills of these windows are continued to form a red-brick or terra-cotta string course. The clerestory windows are grouped in fours (except again over the first bay of the west side - which has a unit of two only). These clerestory wooden frame windows have flat heads, wooden pilasters and "flat consoles" between the units. They are glazed with stained glass in a rectangular pattern with a decorative floral border.

The two smaller side apses have single-arched openings at the rear with four-light casement windows and four-light arched transoms set in a simple wooden frame. Over each opening is a relatively wide brick arch set in the concrete. At the upper level of each apse is a course of shallow, arched panels.

11. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Hipped roof over central section; shed roofs over side aisles. All roof surfaces are covered with red S-tiles.

- b. Cornices, eaves: In general, the fairly wide wooden cornices and raking cornices of the Grace Methodist Church are tripartite and composed of: A modified cyma reversa cymatium, a corona, and a cavetto bed molding. Now the cornices are only partially visible because of large modern metal eaves troughs. Both the cornices and eaves troughs are painted a cream color.
- c. Tower: The square concrete tower is elaborately decorated with dull red brick and terra cotta at the upper levels. The massive, plain concrete first stage rises approximately to the ridge line of the main section of the church. Above this is a slightly smaller square section - decorated mainly with brick quoins and a bracketed terra-cotta cornice. The next stage consists of an elaborate parapet and octagonal tower heavily decorated with red brick and terra cotta of an Italian and Spanish mannerist design. Four arched openings and four canopied niches decorate the sides of this octagonal tower. It also has a broken, bracketed cornice. Above this is a dull red, low, conical spire with curious small stud-like projections. The upper two stages of this tower and spire are entirely dull red (or salmon) in color.

#### C. Description of Interior

- 1. Plan: Three-aisle church plan (approximately square in over-all dimensions) with arched, five-sided interior apse. (The other two apses are not visible from the main sanctuary). The side aisles under shed roofs are separated from the high center section by three-bay arcades.
- 2. Staircase: A wooden staircase is located in the tower and leads to the choir loft over the main entry.
- 3. Flooring: Recently (1956) square cork tile was laid on the floor under the pews. The "blond" color is similar to the stained woodwork that predominates in the interior.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Generally the walls have a vertical, molded wooden wainscoting over high molded wooden baseboards. Above the wainscoting the walls are plastered and painted pink. The rear walls of the side aisles have a thin wooden sheathing of overlapping "scale" of "scallop" design. This work is similar to some of the woodwork at the Ponce de Leon Hotel. The wooden framework and the truss system (king post trusses) of the

ceiling are exposed.

5. Doors and doorways: Three wooden double main entry doors (each section has sixteen panels). A six-paneled wooden door leads to the northwest apse which is a storage room. (There is no interior access to the northeast apse and the room under the main apse, which formerly housed a boiler and now has heating and air-conditioning units and a bilge pump.) A double door, each unit with six panels, is located in the last bay of the west side and gives access to the arcade which leads to the former parsonage; a small wooden door with metal louvers leads to the tower; a single wooden door with ten panels leads into the minister's office in the southeast corner of the church.
6. Decorative features and trim: The three-level chancel has a high vertical-paneled, wooden wainscoting and two wooden pulpits. One of the pulpits is a relatively simple, low one to the right (east) of the simple altar. A high raised pulpit is to the left (west) of the altar. This pulpit sits on an inverted "cone," has narrow decorative pilasters, swags, panels, and a broken denticulated cornice at handrail level. The cantilevered wooden hood rests on an engaged wooden column that has decorative diagonal banding, a "Tuscan" capital, and egg-and-dart molding. This hood also has cherub heads with wing decorations on each of three corners.

In the apse there are choir pews which face the congregation. Over the central bay of this apse is a blind Gothic opening with thirteen panels and a simple wooden cross. A solid, paneled wooden communion rail separates the chancel from the congregation. The flat horizontal surface of this "rail" has small round holes for individual paper communion cups.

Other decorative features include carved wooden keystones over the arches that separate the side aisles from the central section of the church, carved wooden capitals on the wooden piers, and wooden "scallops" (similar to that already discussed on the rear walls of the side aisles) over the arches and between the clerestory windows. The wooden trusses of the main roof have carved wooden brackets.

7. Lighting: Elaborate metal lighting fixtures (electric) hang from the center of each arch. A larger round fixture hangs from the central truss. These all probably date from the 1956 renovation of the interior.

8. Heating: A recently (also probably 1956) installed gas heating unit is in the northeast apse and under the main apse.

D. Site

1. Orientation: Faces almost due south.
2. Outbuildings: To the west of the church is the former church parsonage. It is connected to the sanctuary by an arcade that has meeting rooms behind it. The two-story (with central tower) parsonage is also of concrete construction and has a tile roof. It was conceived as an integral part of the church complex. The interior has been extensively altered for classroom and office purposes.
3. Landscaping, walks, and enclosures: The street sides of the corner property (south and east) have concrete walls at the sidewalk line. They form an "exedra" at the main church entry. The lawn that surrounds the church has random-placed cabbage palm trees. There is a concrete walk to the parsonage entrance and the connecting arcade. Some evergreens are next to the church building.

Prepared by John C. Poppeliers  
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